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# **From the Analysis of Ecological discourse to the Ecological Analysis of discourse**

Richard Alexander and Arran Stibbe

## **Abstract**

This article consists of a theoretical consideration of ecolinguistics, starting off with a working definition and then using this to look at two principle trends within the emerging discipline. The two trends considered are ‘the analysis of ecological discourse’ and the metaphorical ‘language ecology’. The conclusion is that ecolinguistics is more than just the analysis of texts which happen to be explicitly about the environment, and is more than just a metaphorical way of thinking about language contact. Instead, ecolinguistics is, primarily, the ‘ecological analysis of discourse’.

Keywords: ecolinguistics, language ecology, discourse analysis

## **1 Introduction**

This article describes and explores Ecological Discourse Analysis as a central approach in the discipline of ecolinguistics, and contrasts it with ‘the analysis of ecological discourse’ and ‘language ecology’. The starting point is a definition of ecolinguistics, something which is not without its difficulties since there is no generally accepted definition and any definition is bound to either be so vague that it is meaningless (e.g., the study of language in an ecological context) or to exclude approaches which someone, somewhere considers to be ecolinguistics. Still, a definition is necessary even just for the span of this article, in order to put a case forward for the central importance of ecological discourse analysis.

Clearly ecolinguistics combines ecology and linguistics, two disciplines which at first appear to be unconnected. The disconnection occurs only if ecology, which is the study of the relationship of organisms with each other and the physical environment, fails to consider human beings as organisms. An inclusive view would be that ecology consists of the relationships of humans with other humans, other organisms, and the physical environment. Language, then, is relevant to the extent that it plays a role in how humans relate to each other, to other organisms and to the environment. That does not mean that any study of the role of language in setting up relationships is ecolinguistics – there is another crucial aspect of ecology that needs to be present. The relationships that ecologists study are not just inconsequential ways that organisms interact with each other and their environment, but specifically those that sustain life. In the same way that medical science is normatively orientated towards the prevention of disease and sustaining the life of individual people, the discipline of ecology is normatively orientated towards not just studying but also preserving the ecosystems that life depends on. This is very much the spirit in which much ecolinguistics is carried out, and there is no reason why a normative orientation towards protecting, preserving and enhancing the systems that support life should make it any less scientific or evidence based than medical science.

If we take the definition of linguistics as simply ‘the study of language’ for now, we end up with the following definition for ecolinguistics:

Ecology is the study of the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment. It is normatively orientated towards preserving relationships which sustain life.

In other words, ecolinguistics is concerned with how language is involved in forming, maintaining, influencing or destroying relationships between humans, other life forms and the

environment. The idea of ‘humans’ is rather vague – what is meant is certainly not humans en masse, since it would be impossible to generalize. It is not specific individuals, since on their own few people have a heavy influence on general human behaviour. Instead, the most appropriate level appears to be groups of humans as they are organised into cultures, societies, professions, industries and institutions. Groups of humans coordinate their practices and world-views using discourses – particular ways of talking about, writing about, representing, and, ultimately, constructing, reality. Discourses consist of clusters of linguistic (and other semiotic) features used by groups in speaking about the world, which come together to produce specific models of reality. These models or shaping devices enable humans to construct relationships with the real world and so it is these models, and the cluster of linguistic features which make them, that are a primary concern of ecolinguistics.

The article does not aim to give a comprehensive description of the ‘ecological analysis of discourse’, but rather to explain what it consists of through contrasting it with two different approaches: ‘the analysis of ecological discourse’ and ‘language ecology’.

## **2 Some preliminary remarks on language and the world**

We begin with some general observations. Are our perceptions influenced by language? It is practically a truism that they both are and are not. J. R. Firth’s (1957: 24) position can help us:

Using language is one of the forms of human life, and speech is immersed in the immediacy of social intercourse. The human body is that region of the world which is the primary field of human experience but it is continuous with the rest of the world. We are in the world and the world is in us. Voice produced sound has its origins in the deep experience of organic existence. In terms of living, language activity is meaningful.

Notice how Firth focuses on human oneness with the world – an anthropologically monist perspective which is hence profoundly ecological. The ‘deep experience of organic existence’ has given rise to human language and hence the key phrase ‘[i]n terms of living, language activity is meaningful’ has clear material and social roots. Firth’s pupil, Halliday, has focused holistically on the ‘meaningfulness’ of the material and social system that is language. He notes that semantic systems (1978: 198) ‘are significant for the ways their speakers interact with one another.’ Yet they do not ‘determine the ways in which the members of the community *perceive* the world around them.’ Halliday pinpoints how they ‘determine what the members of the community *attend to*’ (1978: 198). (Halliday’s emphasis.)

So it is the case that what people around us ‘attend to’ is linguistically shaped. Recurrent wordings or expressions have a habitualizing effect on society, as too do particular discourse patterns. These serve to mould and anchor the everyday culture of the speech community which uses them. But such is human history that people can of course think outside the box, as Halliday notes:

We are not the prisoners of cultural semiotic; we can all learn to move outside it. But this requires a positive act of semiotic reconstruction. We are socialized within it, and our meaning potential is derived from it (1978: 140).

In his later work (2007: 13) Halliday refers to ‘semodiversity’ or diversity of meanings, raising the complex issue of how the human race as a whole actually benefits from such diversity. Against this background we now address the issue of how language influences humans’ attention with regard to ecological issues.

We will be aiming to demonstrate that the discourse employed in specific contexts and situations which deal with ecological issues constructs either explicitly, or more likely

implicitly, standpoints on a problem. What is deeply embedded or even hidden by certain linguistic choices is what a critical analysis of ecological texts sets out to unearth.

### 3 Analysis of ecological discourse

We turn now to what we can call the analysis of ecological discourse or the ways humans use language to talk about ecology. We consider what has been achieved in research and practical and impact terms.

Over the past three decades a considerable body of both academic research work and activist, political and journalistic literature has accumulated. Copious research findings analyzing the discourse surrounding a wide range of ecological issues and activities have been accumulated. Numerous methods have been applied to show how aspects of the ecology and environment have been articulated and construed in the media and advertizing fields. We will make no attempt to survey this vast field. Instead we briefly pick out some representative findings to illustrate some of the main themes and approaches involved.

We can start off with Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001). This is collection of significant contributions to the now established field of ecolinguistics. There is a section with many articles explicitly analyzing ecological discourse. Such research brings out the involvement of the language system in constructing or, at the least, shaping a viewpoint on, ecological issues. Following Gerbig (1993) and Schleppegrell (1996) one can look at features rendering abstraction and agency or lack of it. Nominalization is a feature which allows the agent to be omitted; for example, 'extinctions of the rainforest' leaves unstated who is responsible for the extinction.

Many studies have concentrated on lexical choices and their implications. For instance, Goatly (2000: 278) notes that '[i]f we use the word environment, presumably we suggest that humans are central and more important than nature.' Heuberger (2007 and 2008) provides an overview of how this anthropocentric and speciesist perspective is manifested in English and German. Distancing techniques, euphemisms and the utility principle are reflected in talk about animals. Over 35 years ago Alexander (1973: 19) reviewed primate studies and quoted Comfort (1966: 49-50), who made the point that especially in primatology the practice of treating animals as if they were 'quaint little men' has 'made us miss much which is interesting in their behaviour, precisely at the point where it is *unlike* ours.' This paternalistic and arrogant attitude towards animals, arguably an unconscious cover-up for our 'fear' of them, was dissected by the English critic John Berger (1971).

Goatly (2002) employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate the representation of nature on the BBC World Service radio. Goatly shows how CDA has espoused a form of Whorfian relativity. It is not through the structure of language which this modified Whorfian theory affects thinking or expresses ideological positions. Instead, 'choices from within the resources of a single language do the same' (2002: 3). He also unearthed how grammatical choices underlie the phenomenon of speciesism mentioned above, noting that (2002: 12) '[s]harks, like wolves have a bad press.' Goatly holds that it is human connections and news values that feeds into the way nature is 'constructed' by the BBC (2002: 21). There are alternative ways to represent nature, however, which lack such generic and ideological imperatives.

Schultz (1992) also takes issue with words and phrases privileging exploitation (of nature, of women, of people in general). She argues that people are unable to protect the environment if this continues. She provides options to exploitative terms and phrases: instead of 'controlled burning' she suggests 'authorized burning', 'to log forest' instead of 'to harvest forest' and 'old or ancient tree' instead of 'over mature tree'.

The methods used to analyze ecological or environmental discourse are worthy of

mention. Deconstructing language employing the tools of linguistic analysis demonstrates the ideological import of language structures. Halliday's (1978) 'social semiotic' contextualized the social ecology of language use and inspired in part what has been called 'Orwellian linguistics', whose importance Beaugrande (2006: 41) rightly, if baroquely, identifies as the 'immediate fons et origo of critical discourse analysis'. This 'critical linguistics' as expounded by Fowler et al. (1979) – a form of 'socially useful linguistics' – has since matured into the widespread use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) methods.

Stibbe and Zunino (2008) employ CDA to discuss the multiplicity of meanings of 'biodiversity'. Aspects uncovered include the presuppositions certain collocates and metaphor usage hint at. The authors show how metaphor analysis serves 'to unpack some of the ideology and consequences behind various discursive constructions of biodiversity that are used in different spheres' (2008: 166). After enumerating a range of metaphors, which 'with their ready-made structures, provide a very efficient form for thinking about and communicating models', they disclose the troubling entailments of certain metaphors. For example, to speak about the 'spaceship earth' and biodiversity as a 'life support system' is to focus on mechanical systems involving static functional parts (2008: 77). Yet ecosystems are dynamic and living entities.

One method combines CDA with corpus linguistic techniques (Alexander 2009). Such quantitative data yielded by a corpus can underpin results from a CDA approach, thus showing empirically how specific linguistic features serve to uphold discourse processes, such as evaluation and argumentative strategies and more generally the ideological stances adopted by speakers or writers. Core chapters in Alexander (2009) interrogate how oil companies and agribusiness utilize language to argue for and propagate selected positions in relation to the current ecological crisis. The book sets out to unpick lexical and discourse patterning and unearths some disturbing truths along the way.

Stamou and Paraskevopoulos (2008) employ a CDA theoretical framework to throw light on ecotourism activities. By coupling content analysis and an investigation of linguistic features of visitors' books at a Greek nature reserve the authors have tapped into the way people construct protection acts and concern for environmental issues. The results are sobering indeed. The authors ascertained that knowledge of the environment was lacking and the visitors hardly feel any responsibility for the places they are able to visit. The texts analyzed from two study periods (1996-7 and then 2005) suggest a slight increase in environmental awareness. Small comfort perhaps! They state (2008: 36): 'By concealing its consumerist essence, ecotourism functions ideologically for ecotourists themselves.'

Mühlhäusler (2000) provides a critical take on the ideological work engaged in by ecotourism operators on Fraser Island, Queensland. After giving examples from brochures and participation observation, he notes (op.cit.: 249): 'The expressions discovery and exploration encountered throughout the ecotourism texts, have been reduced to mean "being taken around on a guided tour to some of the scenic spots that thousands of other tourists have already seen".' His shattering summary says it all (op.cit.: 249): 'What is left are packaged tours, packaged images and ecotourism talk with its bleached meanings.' And also (op.cit.: 250): 'What this paper has tried to show is that green discourse, in the domain of ecotourism, has become a substitute for green practice.'

Several linguists (such as Harré et al. 1999 and Mühlhäusler 2003a) have analyzed the language companies use to talk about the environment in order to distract attention from environmental problems. A recurrent theme considered by activists, and not just critical discourse analysts, is that of 'greenwash' in corporate discourse and advertising (for an early exposé see Greer and Bruno 1996 and also Howlett and Raglan 1992). Poole (2006: 42-49) has documented how 'climate change' came to replace 'global warming', which sounds more threatening. The 'career' of the phrase 'climate change' shows how controversial terms can

be integrated by politicians and the media, or practically sidelined. Carvalho (2005) analyzed the British quality press for the period 1985-2000. She demonstrates how 'political governance of climate change' is 'constructed in and by the media', and underlines how political responsibility and commitment are 'represented and constituted'. Carvalho asked: 'Have the media validated or challenged policy choices with impact on climate change?' A major finding of this study is that 'the government's discourse has had a strong and almost constant effect of structuration of [sic] the press's discourse' (op.cit.:19). Moreover 'the ideological pillar of neo-liberalism has been left unshaken' (op.cit.: 20). As elsewhere, we find the preference for particular words and metaphors which help to conceal certain aspects of reality and direct attention at others.

Similarly, using case and critical discourse-based textual studies, Alexander (2008) reveals how easy it is for the anti-green movement and its 'friends' to create and control the media discourse agenda. The paper highlights some of the forces and agents who are consciously preventing or diluting environmentalist and ecological positions.

#### **4 Language ecology**

In this section we consider an approach which could be labelled 'language ecology', after Haugen (1972), which uses the term 'ecology' metaphorically, and concerns the relationships of languages to other languages and the places the languages are spoken in. Within this metaphor, languages are treated as species, which have contact with each other, can displace each other, and can become endangered or extinct. The normative orientation is towards protecting and enhancing the status of minority or endangered languages. This is in contrast with ecolinguistics, as defined above, where ecology is taken literally as the life-sustaining relationships between humans, other organisms and the physical environment. However, the two approaches are not entirely distinct, and this section discusses the ways that insights from 'language ecology' have been used within ecolinguistics.

'Sustaining Language' is the title of a collection of essays in applied ecolinguistics (Fill and Penz 2007). The calculated, ambivalent wordplay contains within it the two approaches. On the one hand there is the task of 'sustaining languages', i.e., preserving linguistic diversity, and on the other hand there is language which encourages people to behave in ways which preserve the physical ecosystems that support life, 'language which is life sustaining.' This recalls a distinction made by Halliday (2007: 14) between 'institutional ecolinguistics, the relation between a language and those who speak it (and also, in this case, those who may be speaking it no longer)', and 'what we might call systemic ecolinguistics', which concerns the impact of language on human decision making and consequently on the ecologically significant actions that humans take. Halliday refers to his (1990) AILA keynote speech, as being about the latter, 'systemic ecolinguistics'. In this speech, Halliday criticises the linguistic construction of growthism. He asks: how do our ways of meaning affect the impact humans have on the environment?

Fill and Penz's (2007) collection contains essays both about the influence of specific forms of language on (real) ecosystems, and on 'language ecology', which focuses on the preservation of linguistic diversity. However, the two groups of essays are not pursuing unrelated goals. Those writing on 'language ecology' claim that there is a relationship between linguistic diversity and biological diversity. Diversity is therefore the bracket linking Halliday's two dimensions. On the consequences of languages dying out, Halliday says (2007: 13) 'it is tempting to argue from the biological to the linguistic sphere, and to say, just as diversity of species is necessary to environmental, ecological well-being, so diversity of languages is necessary to cultural, eco-social well-being. But does the analogy hold?' He cautiously considers this to be a moot point.

And yet for Muhlhäusler, 'language is interconnected with the world – it both constructs and is constructed by it' (2003b: 68). Language is interlinked with the world in 'numerous complex ways'. He sets out his unabashed ecological stall (op.cit.: 68): 'I take the ecological view that many interrelationships and inter-dependencies in any ecology are mutually beneficial and that some are exploitative and parasitical. In a healthy balanced ecology about 90% of the interrelationships are mutually beneficial.' He notes: 'Another ecological hypothesis is that diversity is needed for the long-term sustainability of any ecology.' Muhlhäusler's arguments against the growthism of the English language can be seen as parallel to Halliday's (1990) arguments against economic growthism (see Alexander 2003).

Muhlhäusler has demonstrated the dramatic consequences of what happens when English replaces other languages. He wrote (2003b: 78) that:

Crystal's view (1997: 116) that 'English is a language which has repeatedly found itself in the right place at the right time' needs to be queried. For many Pacific Islands, including Pitcairn, it was not the right place.

When local languages are displaced by dominant world languages such as English what is lost are the discourses which encode everything people have learned about living sustainably in the local environment. These are replaced by discourses such as those of economic growth, consumerism and neoliberalism that are at the core of an unsustainable society. The prospect of English moving from a foreign language to a second language to the sole language of a growing number of communities is clearly, then, ideological. In the social world, use of the dominant neo-liberal discourse that holds that the spread of English is a 'natural' process needs questioning. Muhlhäusler ([1994] 2001: 164) writes that:

I would suggest that Westerners are trapped within the limitations imposed on them by their languages and this is one of the principal reasons for the lack of genuine progress in the environmental sciences. The example of environmental discourse illuminates the dangers of monolingualism and monoculturalism and shows how many different interpretations – and many languages – are necessary to solve the problems facing the world.

Pennycook (1999) adopts a different view 'Taken alone, however, the language ecology metaphor is limited since it relies so heavily on a notion of what is 'natural' and therefore on what may at times appear a conservative notion of preservation...conservation may easily slide into conservatism.' The main criticism of the 'language ecology' metaphor, however, is that while the general mapping of endangered species to endangered languages appears logical enough, there is no reason to expect languages to interact with each other and the physical environment in ways which parallel the way that organisms do, since the languages are not subject to the same laws of thermodynamics, energy flows and geochemical cycles as species are. As Pennycook (2004: 213) points out:

Although the notion of language ecology has been both popular and productive as a way of understanding language and environment, drawing our attention to the ways in which languages are embedded in social, cultural, economic and physical ecologies, and operate in complex relations with each other, a critical exploration of the notion of language ecology points to the need to be very wary of the political consequences of biomorphic metaphors: the enumeration, objectification and biologisation of languages render them natural objects rather than cultural artefacts; linguistic diversity may be crucial to humans, but language diversity may not be its most important measure; and languages do not adapt to the world: they are part of human endeavours to create new worlds.



Overall, we can say that ‘language ecology’ is a metaphor which, like all metaphors, has uses and limitations. The danger of the metaphor is that any kind of research which happens to consider the relationships between languages and the places they are spoken in is labelled ‘ecolinguistics’ because of the metaphor rather than any relationship to actual ecology. Only when research explores the implications of language contact or linguistic diversity for human behaviour and the consequent impact on real, physical ecosystems does it become ‘ecolinguistics’. In our opinion it would be quite possible to explore the implications of language contact on the ecosystems which support life without using the word ‘ecology’ to refer to the interaction of languages with each other. It would be possible to explore, for example, how local sustainable discourses are displaced by dominant global discourses of consumerism and neoliberalism through the global spread of English without the term ‘language ecology’, as in fact, Mühlhäusler (2001) quoted above does.

## 5 Ecological analysis of discourse

The article started by claiming that the primary focus of ecolinguistics is on discourses which have an impact on the way that humans interact with each other, other species and the environment. Among those discourses are those of environmentalism, ecology, and biological conservation, but it would be a mistake to think that these are the only discourses which have an impact on how humans treat the systems that support life, or even that these are the primary ones. Articles in the online journal *Language and Ecology* ([www.ecoling.net/journal.html](http://www.ecoling.net/journal.html)) have, for example, explored the discourses of men’s health magazines, consumer electronics magazines, advertising, neoclassical economics, financial institutions, and animal product industries. To focus on just one of these – Stibbe (2003) shows how linguistic distancing techniques used in the pork industry represent pigs as machines and objects, a representation which provides the foundation of a form of intensive farming that is both inhumane and environmentally damaging. Texts such as animal industry handbooks, lifestyle magazines, and economics textbooks are not part of explicitly ‘environmental’ or ‘ecological’ discourses, but all have a potential impact on human behaviour. In fact, it is specifically because dominant discourses such as those of economic growth or animal product industries fail to mention environmental or ecological considerations that they are so potentially damaging to those systems.

Halliday (1990: 25) started off the discipline of ecolinguistics not by analysing the language of the environmental movement but instead by investigating aspects of grammar which he claims ‘conspire...to construe reality in a certain way...that is no longer good for our health as a species.’ The first aspect he describes is that mass nouns like soil and water are unbounded and do not therefore reflect the limited supply of such essential resources; the second is that antonymic pairs have a positive (unmarked) pole which means that ‘bigger’ is aligned with ‘better’; the third is that humans tend to be given more agency in grammar than other species; the fourth is that pronoun use and mental processes divide the world falsely into conscious beings (humans and to some extent their pets) and non-conscious beings (other species). Chalwa (1991: 262) likewise claims that ‘the language habits of fragmenting the mass, quantifying intangibles and imaginary nouns, and perceiving time in terms of past, present and future are factors in our inability to perceive the natural environment holistically’.

Halliday (1990) gives a pessimistic comment about the power of ecolinguistics to address sustainability issues, primarily because both his and Chalwa’s analyses focus on the level of the general grammar of languages. He writes ‘I do not think even the language professionals of AILA can plan the inner layers of grammar’ (op.cit.: 27). To take one

example, Halliday is concerned that as the unmarked pole of the pair growth/shrinkage, the word 'growth' is intrinsically positive. The idea that the economy must shrink, or that 'economic shrinkage is good' is therefore unlikely to catch on. He considers terms such as 'negative shrinkage' or 'elephantitis' (as alternatives for growth), and 'zero growth' or 'negative growth' (as a goal), but rejects these unpromising alternatives (op.cit.: 25). Clearly, in this case, ecolinguists cannot intervene on the level of grammar and change 'shrink' into the unmarked, positive member of the pair.

Halliday's analysis, however, is limited. A more realistic approach would be to recognise that the term 'growth' is part of an economic discourse which models or shapes reality in a particular way, and look for whole alternative models/discourses which have greater practical adequacy. The New Economics Foundation, for example, points out that growth in GDP beyond a certain level does not correspond with increases in wellbeing, and so replaces the inadequate proxy, growth, with the end itself, wellbeing. This leads to a discourse where the maximisation of wellbeing, rather than growth, is the goal and includes terms such as *wellbeing indicators*, *Gross National Happiness* and *Happy Planet Index*.

So, rather than trying to alter the grammar of the English language by changing the marking of the term 'growth', it is far easier just to stop talking about growth, because it is not a measure of anything important, and instead start talking about something like wellbeing. This has already occurred with the term 'balance of trade deficit', which used to be used extensively in government circles and right across the media, but has been virtually dropped because economists cannot agree whether it measures anything important or not. The discourse surrounding economic growth could similarly be dropped and replaced with the discourse of 'wellbeing'. David Cameron, for instance, took up the discourse of wellbeing early on in his leadership of the Conservative Party: 'Wellbeing can't be measured by money or traded in markets. It's about the beauty of our surroundings, the quality of our culture, and, above all, the strength of our relationships' (Cameron in Brown 2007).

There are two things that this discussion of Halliday illustrates. One is that the clustering of grammatical and semantic features within specific discourses is a more promising level for ecolinguistics to focus on than general comments about the 'grammar of English'. The second is that what is most important for ecolinguistics is the analysis of the potential impact of particular discourses on human behaviour and hence on the ecosystems that support life. This means analysing discourses, any discourses, within an ecological framework, rather than simply analysing discourses which happen to be about the environment. Halliday (1990: 23-4) gives some clues as to the ecological framework he uses to analyse language:

We are using up the capital resources – not just the fossil fuels which we could (pace Boeing) do without, but the fresh water and agricultural soils which we can't live without.

As expressed in this one sentence, the ecological framework is clearly limited, since it considers human survival but not human wellbeing, social justice, or the wellbeing of other species. It also fails to consider the central importance of fossil fuels in global food production. All ecological frameworks are, however, likely to contain simplifications and omissions, but what is important is the degree to which the authors make the ecological framework they are using explicit, so the reader knows what criteria discourses are being judged against. Without being specific about the ecological framework it is possible for ecolinguistics to appear to consist of scarcely more than ad hoc comments about texts which happen to be related to the environment.

Ecological frameworks, in this sense, consist of a set of philosophical background assumptions which together form a structure which grounds the normative orientation. The

assumptions are about values, such whether life is valuable, whether both human life and the life of other animals and plants is valuable, whether beings have a nature and thrive if allowed to follow that nature, whether that thriving is valuable. The assumptions are also about the conditions which allow valued outcomes to occur, such as the role of biodiversity and the climate system in supporting life and allowing beings to flourish according to their nature.

## 6 Conclusion

This article started off by giving the following definition of ecolinguistics:

Ecolinguistics is the study of the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment. It is normatively orientated towards preserving relationships which sustain life.

Given this definition, the scope of ecolinguistics is clearly far wider than the analysis of texts which happen to be explicitly about environmental or ecological concerns. Instead the scope is on all discourses which have the potential to encourage people to behave in ways which damage or preserve ecological systems. The definition makes it clear that the term 'eco' refers to literal ecosystems made up of interacting organisms, geochemical cycles and the atmosphere rather than the metaphor of a 'language ecology' made up of interacting languages in places. Research on 'language ecology' only becomes ecolinguistics when the impact of language contact on human behaviour and hence on real ecosystems is considered.

It could be argued that all discourses have a potential impact on human behaviour, and that all human behaviour has a potential impact on the ecosystems that support life. So does that make ecolinguistics simply 'discourse analysis'? The answer to that is no, since to be ecolinguistics in the definition given in this article, it is essential that discourses are analysed within an ecological framework which considers the impact of the discourses on the systems which support life, hence, 'the ecological analysis of discourse'.

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